



STATE and LOCAL OPPORTUNITY NOTE



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Attachment E

Prime Sponsors: Rep. Andy Kerr, D-Lakewood
Sen. Bob Bacon, D-Fort Collins

Bill Status: House Education

Policy Analyst: Frank Waterous, (303) 297-0456

Title: Concerning parental involvement in kindergarten through 12th grade education

This bill represents a net opportunity gain for Colorado. Parental involvement is one of the most important elements in children's academic success. By making it possible for more parents to attend parent-teacher conferences and other academic activities, the bill takes an important step in closing the state's achievement gaps, reducing the dropout rate and increasing the number of students who successfully transition to postsecondary educational opportunities and careers.

Colorado Department of Education data show that in 2006-07, 18,027 students dropped out of school statewide.¹ By allowing more parents – particularly those from low-income and minority families – to become more active partners in their children's academic success, the number of dropouts would likely decrease. Based on the figure above, each 1 percent decrease in the number of dropouts would represent 180 more students remaining in school. Over time, hundreds more students could graduate from high school and earn postsecondary certificates or degrees, giving them better opportunity for good jobs, higher wages and economic self-sufficiency.

Summary of Legislation

The bill allows parents who work for an employer with at least 10 employees in Colorado to take unpaid leave to attend parent-teacher conferences or other academic activities related to their children's educational advancement. It limits such leave to six hours per month and 40 hours in any academic year.

The bill permits the employer to require employees to take the leave in increments of no more than three hours and to provide written verification

of the academic activity for which the leave is requested. It requires employees to give at least three days' notice of the leave except in emergencies and directs them to make reasonable attempts to schedule leave time outside of regular work hours.

The bill allows employees to substitute vacation, personal or other leave for unpaid leave. Employers providing comparable leave are in compliance and are not required to provide additional leave.

Background

Persistent achievement gaps exist for Colorado's low-income and minority students, and research shows that low-income students drop out at significantly higher rates than students from high-income families.² Parental involvement is consistently cited as one of the key elements associated with increased student success and lower dropout rates.

Yet low-income and minority parents are especially likely to work in jobs that do not provide the time off and flexible schedules needed to meet personal and family needs. Researchers from the Families and Work Institute found that about 38 percent of jobs held by low-wage and low-income employees are low-flexibility jobs.³ Further, only 51 percent of low-wage jobs provide paid vacation time, compared to almost 90 percent of higher-paying jobs.⁴ The Fairness Initiative for Low-Wage Work notes that minorities and women are disproportionately found in low-wage, low-flexibility jobs.⁵

In order to address this situation, and to allow more parents to actively participate in school-based activities, several states (including Illinois, Minnesota, North Carolina and Vermont) and the

The Bell Policy Center believes a top priority of the General Assembly should be to expand opportunities for Coloradans to achieve the American Dream. In that spirit, we offer Opportunity Notes on selected bills. Similar to Fiscal Notes, Opportunity Notes reflect our best analysis of whether a bill, if implemented, will expand opportunities for Coloradans.

A POSITIVE analysis means our research suggests a bill will expand opportunity in a cost effective manner.

A NEGATIVE analysis means our research suggests the measure will restrict opportunities or will not cost-effectively achieve its goals.

District of Columbia have enacted parental-leave laws providing job-protected unpaid leave.⁶

Research/Evidence of Effectiveness

The evidence clearly indicates that supporting parents' involvement in school-based activities is a key strategy for closing achievement gaps, cutting dropout rates and increasing postsecondary participation. A research review by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory found that students with involved parents were more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs.
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits.
- Attend school regularly.
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school.
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.⁷

Other research concludes that the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement is not income or social status but the extent to which the student's family is able to:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning.
- Communicate high yet reasonable expectations.
- Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.⁸

Several studies have found that while families of all incomes, educational levels and ethnic/racial backgrounds are engaged in supporting their children's learning at home, white, middle-class families tend to be more involved at school.⁹ Significantly, recent research suggests that parental involvement is the single strongest predictor of Latino academic performance.¹⁰

Given the evidence, providing more opportunity for parents – particularly those from low-income and minority families – to engage in school-based activities is a prudent public policy decision.

Estimate of Impact and Benefits

Students whose parents are involved in their educational success both at home and at school are more likely to graduate and go on to earn postsecondary credentials. As a result, HB 09-1057 carries both individual and societal benefits. On an individual level, earnings dramatically increase and

unemployment rates decrease with each higher level of education attained.¹¹ On the societal level, the foundation of a strong and competitive state economy is a well-educated citizenry and workforce.

For these reasons, the Bell Policy Center strongly supports HB 09-1057 as an important step forward for opportunity in Colorado.

End notes

¹ Colorado Department of Education, *2007 Colorado Education Facts*.

² Rich Jones, *Understanding and Closing Colorado's Achievement Gap*, The Bell Policy Center Policy Brief, Vol. 1, No.2, March 21, 2006, and *Event Dropout Rates By Family Income, 1972-2001*, National Center for Education Statistics.

³ The Families and Work Institute defines workplace flexibility to include "policies and practices that give employees greater control over their work schedules, work locations, and the ability to take time off to meet personal and family needs." It defines low-wage jobs as those paying less than \$9.73 per hour in 2005. See Heather Boushey, et.al., *Understanding Low-Wage Work in the United States*, The Mobility Agenda and the Center for Economic Policy and Research, March 2007.

⁴ Boushey, et.al., *Understanding Low-Wage Work in the United States*.

⁵ *Fact Sheets*, Fairness Initiative on Low-Wage Work.

⁶ *State Laws Regarding Leave for Parental Involvement in Children's Education*, National Partnership for Women and Families, provided electronically via personal communication with Lorena Garcia, 9to5, National Association of Working Women, Denver, CO, and *Leave for Parental Involvement in School Activities*, National Partnership for Women & Families, Updated September 2008.

⁷ Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002.

⁸ *Effective Strategies: Family Engagement*, National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

⁹ Henderson and Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence*.

¹⁰ See for example Andrew Behnke and Sue Rosman, *Latino Family Engagement: How to Effectively Engage and Connect with Latino Parents and Youth* and Axel Lluch, *The New Latino South: Latinos in North Carolina*, Governor's Office of Hispanic/Latino Affairs.

¹¹ For data on the differences in earning-potential and unemployment based on educational attainment see *Education and Training Pay*, Postsecondary Education Opportunity, Oskaloosa, Iowa, and Dr. Tucker Hart Adams, *The Impact of Public Higher Education on the State of Colorado*, Dec. 2007.